The Treasury of the Faith Series

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XV

MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

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MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

CHAPTER I

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Our Lady's Divine Maternity; her perpetual Virginity.

CARDINAL NEWMAN has reminded us in a famous sermon that "the Glories of Mary are for the sake of her Son." So it is that when we come to consider the revealed truths which our religion teaches us concerning our Lady we realize that they are what is known as *secondary* in the counsels of God. This is in no way to disparage their interest and importance; it is merely to state the obvious fact that from whatever angle we may look at the Blessed Virgin she is never really the centre of the picture. The artist may depict her alone, but she is not alone—whenever we turn our eyes to her, inevitably we think of him whose Mother she is. She points men to her Son, before whom she kneels in adoration as her Lord and Saviour. No more

than any other creature can she be blessed for her own sake independently of him. Her blessedness is the direct consequence of her nearness to him, who alone is Blessed in himself from endless ages. Her whole life—in a unique sense her very existence—can only be rightly viewed in relation to Another, since she was created for this one purpose, to be the human Mother of God made man. Pre-eminently of her it is true that "her life is hidden with Christ in God."

This is the meaning of Blessed Grignon de Montfort when he tells us that our Lady is *The Relation to God*. Mary is the link which "refers" (or brings) God to man, and joins man (above all the Christian man) to God. When the Holy Spirit overshadowed her she became the point of contact between the Human and the Divine. To reach her heart Heaven bent down to earth and in her Motherhood earth was raised to Heaven.

The primary truths of religion concern God in himself, in his Unity of Being and Trinity of Persons—God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. They refer to his Infinite Perfections (known as the Divine Attributes); to the work of Creation, Redemption and Sanctification of men; to the Incarnation of the Everlasting Word, his death upon the Cross, his Resurrection and Ascension, his Session at the Right Hand of

the Father; to the Life-giving, Co-equal, Co-eternal Spirit, who, on the day of Pentecost, came to dwell with the Church of Christ, guiding her into all truth according to the Promises of God.

The central and primary truth of Christianity (that is, of belief not only in God the Father, but also in Jesus Christ our Lord) is the fact that "the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."[1] This is the Mystery or Secret, "hidden from ages and generations,"[2] until it was "manifested" on earth when, first the Shepherds and then the Kings, first the simple and then the learned—wise men from the gorgeous East, but also wise men from the open fields—adored in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Lord of all. "They found the Child," as Christians without number, in every age, have found him since, "with Mary his Mother."[3] And so it has come to pass that all the truths of our Faith (secondary though they are) concerning the incomparable dignity and privileges of our Lady are the great safeguards and witnesses to the primary truths of the Gospel, which, in their setting, shine with a light and splendour such as could hardly encompass the bare statement of transcendental facts, were it to stand alone without any comment or concrete

[1] John i 14. [2] Col. i 26.
[3] Matt. ii 11; Luke ii 16.

illustration. For example, it is easy to say: God is the Supreme Being, Self-existing, Creator of all things in Heaven and on earth. Easy even to say: Christ is God, without exciting much interest or opposition. Certainly in our day and generation there would be nothing sensational in any such statements; they have been made continuously in England for more than thirteen hundred years. But say: Mary is the Mother of God, and people are startled and quick to set to work questioning in their minds. They face realities. They think.

I once heard Cardinal Manning state that John Bright told him that he had heard this sentence, "Mary is the Mother of God," repeated in the course of a sermon preached in Rome, and that for twenty years afterwards he was turning over these six short words in his mind almost every day, and often during the night, asking himself what exactly the preacher could have meant by them. They were unfamiliar to him and grated harshly on his ear—indeed, excepting among Catholics, they had hardly been spoken in our midst for four hundred years. Yet they are nothing more than the affirmation of the elementary, primary Christian truth, that Jesus Christ is God, and that Mary is his Mother. Yes, the proposition: Mary is the Mother of God, is the safeguard and witness of that other pro-

position upon which all our religion depends: Jesus, Mary's Son, is God.

(*a*) God in himself is purely Divine.

(*b*) Our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true Man. He possesses two Natures.

(*c*) Mary is purely human.

"Because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner hath been partaker of the same."[1] By his merciful act of taking flesh and blood God came into immediate contact with his Mother. He became her Son. She is "Mary, the Mother of Jesus," Mary, "of whom was born Jesus." To believe this is the very touchstone and criterion of the Christian Faith. "Nowhere doth he take hold of the angels; but of the Seed of Abraham he taketh hold."[2] "Of the Seed of Abraham," that is, of Mary. She is the Mother of Emmanuel, God with us —not the Mother of his Body merely, nor most certainly the Mother of his human soul, but *his* Mother—in the same way that our mothers are not the mothers merely of our bodies, and most certainly not the mothers of our souls, but *our* mothers. Even so, is Mary *his* Mother—and he is God—God made Man for us men and for our salvation. It is obvious that she who was born in the course of the world's history in the same manner as all other

[1] Heb. ii 14. [2] Heb. ii 16.

women have been born, is not the Mother of the Godhead which is from eternity, but neither is she the Mother only of the Manhood. Her Son is a Divine Person. She is the Mother of Jesus, of the Eternal, of him who, living from all Eternity, in the fulness of time was born of her at Bethlehem in the Human Nature which he had deigned to unite inseparably to himself. Simply, she is the Mother of God.

Saints and Doctors of the Church in East and West have vied one with the other in proclaiming Mary's praises—we can read the beautiful and touching tribute of their devotion in a long line of witnesses to the Tradition of Christendom concerning the wonder and excellence of Mary's Motherhood, from the time of Ephrem the Syrian in dim antiquity, to Alphonsus Liguori living almost in our own days; but no poet, no theologian, no Christian mystic has ever uttered words that may approach in sublimity the simple words of the holy Gospel—" Mary, the Mother of Jesus." The creature has given birth to her Creator. This is the foundation of all her privileges, this is the one outstanding fact in the world's long history. We date from before Christ or from after Christ, that is, before or after Mary bore her Lord as his Mother. Here is the very centre and heart of our religion. It is the fruitful summary of the Faith.

For a full statement of the Catholic Doctrine concerning the One Person and the Two Natures (Divine and Human) of Christ, I must refer my readers to Volume XI. of this series. Suffice it here to recall that the one Person of Christ is Divine, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, who, God from all eternity, assumed a human nature, body and soul, at a definite moment of time, when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin of Nazareth. This union of two natures in the one Divine Person of Christ is called the Hypostatic (or Personal) Union. It is the Mystery of the Incarnation of God; it is also the Mystery of the Divine Motherhood of Mary.

This most sacred article of Christian belief was enshrined in the document known as the Apostles' Creed, which by the common consent of the learned was in its origin the Baptismal profession of faith required of catechumens in the Roman Church from the days of the Apostles Peter and Paul. "I believe in God the Father . . . and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." It was "the Lord of Glory" who was crucified under Pontius Pilate.[1]

We know that St John in his extreme old age wrote his Gospel, and especially its

[1] 1 Cor. ii 8.

opening passage, to confute those who already were making a division between the Everlasting Word of God and Jesus Christ the Son of Mary. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him, and without him was made nothing that was made. And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."[1]

The Word became Mary's Son, and the Word was God.

Let us listen to St John once more:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life . . .; that we declare unto you."[2] Again, "Try the spirits if they be of God. . . . Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that dissolveth Jesus is not of God."[3] Our Lord Jesus Christ is God, and he is come in the flesh, born of Mary of Nazareth. As St Paul writes, he was "made of a woman."[4]

With this teaching impressed upon the hearts and minds of the faithful, having been handed down from the beginning by the Apostles of Jesus Christ, both in their writings

[1] John i 1-14.
[2] 1 John i 1-3.
[3] 1 John iv 2-3.
[4] Gal. iv 4.

and by word of mouth, we can imagine the consternation and even horror with which men listened to the teaching, first of Paul of Samosata and subsequently in the fifth century of his disciple Nestorius, Bishop of the great See of Byzantium, preaching in his Cathedral Church, that our Lady was not rightly called Mother of God, but only Mother of Christ, who was only a human Person, with whom the Word united himself as to an organ or temple of the Divinity. This was in effect to divide or "dissolve" Christ, for on this hypothesis there were two Christs, the Divine Christ who was not the Son of Mary, and the human Christ who was. It contradicted the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as interpreted by all antiquity. The title "Theotokos" (literally God-bearing, in Latin *Deipara*, or *Dei Genitrix*, that is, Mother of God) had been given explicitly to our Lady by practically all the great Fathers who had preceded the denials of Nestorius; by, amongst others, Origen, Methodius, Athanasius, Basil, Epiphanius, great and illustrious names. It was "in possession." This teaching of Christian antiquity was expressed by St Sophronius of Jerusalem when he wrote: "God became Incarnate, not by uniting to himself flesh already formed and a pre-existing soul, for the flesh and the [human] soul of Christ were brought into existence

at the very moment when the Person of the Son of God received them into his Unity. His flesh was not flesh before it became the Flesh of the Word; from the moment when it was animated by a reasonable soul, it was the body and soul [that is to say, a perfect Human Nature] belonging to the Word, who is God, since it did not receive its existence in itself but in him."[1] Julian the Apostate bore striking testimony to this teaching of the Church when he wrote as a reproach that Christians were accustomed to call a creature —Mary of Nazareth—the Mother of God.

This is the Catholic Faith in the Incarnation, that God became Man, the Son of Mary.

Directly the Pope had been informed by St Cyril of Alexandria of the false doctrine of Nestorius, he condemned it by his supreme authority. Not content with this he summoned a General Council (the Third Œcumenical) to meet at Ephesus. This Council deposed Nestorius and solemnly defined the truth that the title " Theotokos " should be given to our Lady, since, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, she had conceived and given birth to God when he assumed Human Nature in her virginal womb.[2]

[1] Letter read and approved in the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681).

[2] Though at first Nestorius had refused the title of Theotokos to our Lady, in the end he admitted

The decree of Ephesus was confirmed by Pope Sixtus III, the successor of St Celestine, the Pope who had first condemned Nestorius and summoned the Council. Thus was the divine Motherhood of Mary, the safeguard of the belief in the Unity of the Person of God made man, upon which the whole superstructure of our religion depends, asserted for all time by the supreme authority of the Apostolic See and of the assembled Bishops of Catholic Christendom.

We read that there were no bounds to the enthusiasm in Ephesus when the decision of the Council was made known proclaiming the integrity of the ancient faith. St Cyril tells us that the people had waited impatiently all day long the result of the deliberations of the assembled Bishops. When all was over and Nestorius had been deposed from his See, Cyril writes: "When we came out of the Church we were led back to our lodgings by the light of torches, for it was already night. Women walked before us carrying censers smoking with incense. The joy seemed almost delirious. Everywhere bonfires were alight. Thus did our Lord show

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that it might be tolerated, but in his own heretical sense "because the temple which was inseparable from the Word was born of her," not because she is the Mother of the Word, that is of God.

his Almighty Power to those who would have robbed him of his Glory."[1]

Our Lord glories in being the Son of Mary. This is the title he gives to himself, " The Son of Man."

Not only is our Blessed Lady the Mother of God. She is the Virgin Mother of God. This union of virginity with motherhood is the crown of Mary's dignity. On this mystery the great St Bernard in his sermons on the glories of the Virgin Mother, full of the love of Mary, gives utterance to his wonder and admiration.

We read in the Holy Scriptures that there is a song that only Virgins shall sing in their heavenly home. They, we are told, " follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, for they were purchased from amongst men, the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb."[2] On this St Bernard writes: " No one will doubt that this song shall be sung by her who is the Queen of Virgins, and that in this singing she will take the lead. But it seems to me that, besides this song in which all the virgins join with their Queen, there is another more sweet and more sublime with which she alone shall gladden the City of God. No one else, even amongst the virgins, shall be found worthy to utter the melodious modulations of this

[1] St. Cyril Alex. XXIV. P.G. LXXVII 137.
[2] Apoc. xiv 4.

second song. This is a right which belongs to her alone who alone amongst virgins rejoices in being a mother, and in being the Mother of God. But she does not glory in herself, rather only in him to whom she has given birth. She glories in the Lord who has made himself her Son, and who, having prepared a singular glory for his Mother in Heaven, willed also to endow her on earth with a singular grace whereby, in an ineffable manner, she might conceive and bring forth without prejudice to her virginity. For the only nativity worthy of God was that which made him Son of the Virgin, as the only motherhood worthy of the Virgin was that which made her Mother of God."[1] And again: "The Angel Gabriel, says the Evangelist, 'was sent to a Virgin'; that is, to one who was a virgin in body, a virgin in mind, a virgin who had sealed her virginity by vow; such a virgin as the Apostle describes, 'holy in body and in spirit'—to a virgin not newly discovered to be such, nor discovered by chance, but chosen from eternity, foreknown and prepared by the Most High for himself, guarded by angels, shown to us by the Patriarchs under types and figures, canonized from afar by the prophets."[2]

All Catholics will feel the truth of this great Saint's words, that, if God were to be born

[1] *Super "Missus est", Hom. ii* 1. [2] *Ibid.*

as a Child upon the earth, no manner of birth would have beseemed him save that which made him Son of a Mother who was also a virgin.

St Proclus, a Patriarch of Constantinople and disciple of St John Chrysostom, writes: "Unless his Mother had remained a virgin her offspring would have been only a man, and the Mystery of the Birth would have disappeared. But if after her Childbearing Mary remained a virgin, how shall he not be God and the Mystery be unutterable?"[1] In the same spirit St Thomas Aquinas says: "In order that the Body of Christ might be shown to be a real Body, he was born of a woman; but in order that his Godhead might be made clear he was born of a virgin."[2]

In this matter we have not been left merely to our own sense of the fitness of things. The testimony of the Holy Scriptures is express. It is also detailed. The wonderful first chapter of St Luke's Gospel was devoted by the Evangelist to "a narration of the things which have been accomplished amongst us"—that is amongst the early disciples of Christ. He tells us that already they had been "instructed" by those who were eye-

[1] *Oratio in laudibus S Mariae.* This discourse was placed as a preamble to the Acts of the Council of Ephesus.

[2] *Summa Theologica*, p. iii, q. xxviii, a. 2.

witnesses of these events. In order that they might be further assured of the "verity" of all they had been taught, St Luke "diligently attained to all things from the beginning,"[1] and wrote his Gospel.

It is clear that the Evangelist could only have received knowledge of the events which happened "at the beginning," directly or indirectly from Mary herself. To whomever she may subsequently have revealed them, it is certain that, in the very nature of things, she was the only earthly witness of their actual occurrence. Ultimately and apart from the teaching of the Catholic Church which on other grounds we know to be based on divine revelation, we receive the narrative on the word of the Mother of Christ.

There was a Virgin.

She was saluted by the Angel Gabriel sent by God to Nazareth where that Virgin dwelt.

To her he was the first on earth to say "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women."

She was "troubled" at his "saying" and thought within herself what his salutation should mean, for she was a Virgin.

"Though all Jewish women," writes Newman, "in each successive age had been hoping to be the Mother of the Christ, so

[1] Luke i 1-4.

that marriage was honourable among them, childlessness a reproach, Mary alone had put aside the desire and the thought of so great a dignity; she who was to bear the Christ gave no welcome to the great announcement that she was to bear him, and why did she act thus towards it? Because she had been inspired, the first of womankind, to dedicate her virginity to God, and she did not welcome a privilege which seemed to involve a forfeiture of her vow. How shall this be, she asked, seeing that I am to live separate from man?"[1]

"And the Angel said: Fear not, Mary, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, and therefore the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called [a Hebraism for shall be] the Son of God."[2]

Behold the great mystery of the Virginal Motherhood set forth in the noble words of the holy Gospel, convincing in their simplicity, as they proclaim with majesty the supernatural history of the origin of our religion. In the beginning they inspired triumphant faith, the faith of the Martyrs and the Saints, as also of the little ones of Christ, who all rested with amplest security

[1] *The Glories of Mary for the Sake of her Son*, p. 352.
[2] Luke i 26-35.

on the Word of God. Such faith they will continue to inspire in Christian men and women until the end of time.

There never has been, and never will be, any other Virgin Mother, but one only. It is a unique wonder. In Mary alone we believe that motherhood was joined to virginity, and that virginity was fruitful. Blessed above all the children of men was the Fruit of her Virginal Motherhood. Those who believe in the Incarnation of God will expect, rather than shrink from, subordinate mysteries surrounding the great Mystery of all mysteries that God became Man. Moreover, to those who believe in God behind Nature it will hardly seem incredible that the Creator should, when he determined to live a human life, act independently of the "laws" or processes that he made for all others. To Mary in her childbearing it could be said with truth as to Esther of old, "This law was not made for thee." St Ambrose teaches us that in the Holy Mass the Consecration of the Body of Christ is effected by no mere human benediction, but by the Words of our Lord. "He spake the Word and they were made: He commanded and they were created." The Lord himself declared: "This is my Body," and his Words effect what they proclaim. Surely that which is true of "the Making" of the Body and Blood of Christ upon the altar

is true also of their first "Making" within the Virgin Mother's womb. It was accomplished by the direct Word of God, the Creator of all things. We rest in his Power and Wisdom and no other explanation is required. As Abbot Vonier writes: "In Mary's Motherhood, God's action is supremely exclusive, absolutely unconditioned by the created law of life."[1]

It has been the firm and constant belief of the Catholic Church from the beginning that our Blessed Lady remained a spotless Virgin to the end. *Virgo ante partum, in partu et post partum:* A Virgin before her Childbearing, during and after that Childbearing. In the special Preface provided by the Church for the Blessed Virgin's Feasts we read the words: *quae Virginitatis gloria permanente Lumen aeternum mundo effudit.* "The glory of her Virginity still abiding with her, she shed upon the world the Everlasting Light." As light passes through the crystal leaving it uninjured, so did the Light of the World, who is from Eternity, shine upon his Creation when he visited the earth; nor did his Virgin-Mother suffer harm or pain in her Childbearing, when Emmanuel passed from the resting-place he had chosen awhile for his habitation before he bestowed his visible presence amongst his own. Mary was his

[1] *The Divine Motherhood*, p. 11.

way to earth from Heaven, when he came to us, "skipping over the hills, leaping over the mountains."

The Fathers of the Church remind their readers that of this mysterious passage of the Body of our Lord at his Birth there are analogies in the Holy Scriptures. Thus St Jerome writes: "Christ is a Virgin. His Mother, too, was Ever-Virgin. She is Mother and Virgin. In like manner Jesus came [to his Apostles after his Resurrection] when the doors were closed. So also in his Sepulchre, which was new and hewn out of hardest rock, none had been placed after him, and none was placed before him."[1]

We are reminded of the Prophecy of Ezekiel: "And he brought me back to the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary, which looked towards the East; and it was shut, and the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it, because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut."[2]

In this manner was fulfilled the other prophecy, familiar to us all: "Behold a Virgin shall be with Child and bring forth a Son, and they shall call his Name

[1] *Apologia ad Pammach. pro lib. advers. Jovinian. in fine.*

[2] Ezekiel xliv 1-3.

Emmanuel, which being interpreted means God with us."[1]

It is difficult for us in the present day to imagine the horror and indignation which in the fifth century of our era was evoked by the news that certain heretics, Helvidius and Jovinian by name, had set themselves against the universal tradition of Christianity, which had been handed down from the beginning, and dared to assert that our Blessed Lady had other children after the Birth of her Divine Son.

They based their heresy on certain passages of the Gospel and were answered at once conclusively by St Jerome, so that no more was heard of any doubt as to our Lady's Virginity until the time of the Reformation. Helvidius and Jovinian appealed to the passage in St Matthew's Gospel "until she brought forth her first-born Son."[2] This usage of the word "until" for "before" denoting what had actually happened without any reference to what would, or would not, happen afterwards, was common amongst the Hebrews. Thus we read (Gen. viii 6 and 7) that Noah sent a raven out of the ark which did not return "*until* the waters were dried up on the earth," that is, did not return at all. Again, when it is said of our Lord that he should sit at God's Right Hand "*until* his

[1] Isaias vii 14; *cf.* Matt. i 23. [2] Matt. i 1-25.

enemies be made his footstool" are we to understand that it was only until then? Many similar examples can be given, if necessary. St Jerome asks derisively, if anyone were to say that Helvidius did no penance until he died, would it follow that he did penance after his death? With regard to the word "First-born" it is certain that whatever may be the case in our current English, its use amongst the Jews in no way implied that other children were born afterwards. We read even of the Eternal Generation of the Son: "When he bringeth his First-begotten into the world, he saith, 'Let all the Angels of God adore him.'" The words "First-born" and "First-Begotten," at least in the language of the Scriptures, involve no reference to any subsequent birth. They testify simply to what they affirm—that the son to whom they refer was the first-born; whether he was the only son, or was not, can in no way be gathered from the expression itself.

A further difficulty has arisen from the words "the brethren" and "the brothers and sisters" of our Lord. But it disappears immediately so soon as we learn that these phrases are applied in Scriptural usage to all near, and even to distant, relations. Really this "difficulty" is of the same nature as that of an Englishman who might insist that the French word "*parents*" can only mean

parents in our English sense of the word, in the teeth of information given him by a Frenchman that in his language it often means kinsfolk.

Quite independently of the teaching of the Faith, it can be shown that these brothers and sisters of our Lord were the sons and daughters of Alpheus, or Cleopas, and of Mary, our Lady's sister.[1] It is clear from the Gospels that there existed not only a near kinship between our Lord and his "brethren," but also that they lived in close companionship. Indeed, it seems probable that after the death of St Joseph the Blessed Virgin made her home with her sister, so that living together they constituted but one family, much as we so often see in Italy today several generations living under one roof-tree.

We may recall with pleasure the words of the learned Origen: "Would that it might happen to me that I should be called a fool

[1] See the large edition of Cruden's *Concordance* under "Brethren" and "Sisters." Also the article in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* on "Brethren of the Lord," proving that they were not, as was once thought possible, the children of St Joseph by a previous marriage. In Italy, even now, cousins are called "brothers." A friend has told me that an Italian once said to him: "I saw my brother this morning," and when he replied that he thought he had no brothers, the answer came: "Oh yes, but I mean my brother-cousin."

by the unbelieving because I have believed such things as these. The event has shown that I have not given credit to foolishness, but to wisdom. For unless the Birth of the Saviour had been heavenly, unless it possessed something divine and surpassing the common things of humanity, his doctrine would never have penetrated throughout the world."[1]

When we reflect upon the position bestowed by God upon our Lady in the central mystery of the Incarnation, we may cease to wonder at the solemnity of the warning of the Fathers assembled at the Council of Ephesus: "Should any man not acknowledge that Mary is Mother of God, let him know that he is cut off from the Godhead, for without a doubt by his own act he is cut off from the knowledge of God revealed in Jesus Christ, Son of Mary the Virgin"—and "this is Eternal Life, to know thee the One True God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

If we turn our thoughts away from the consideration of the Christian doctrine about our Lady to the effect which that doctrine has had when realized in practice by the Christian people, we shall recognize how true devotion to Christ is inseparable from true devotion to Mary.

Terrible must be the fate of all who attempt to separate those whom God has bound

[1] *Homil. vii in Lucam.*

together—the Mother and her Son; on the other hand all who honour Mary as best they may will make their own the witness of St Alphonsus: "The more we honour Mary, the more we shall honour God," who, when he came to free us all, did not disdain the lowliness of the Virgin's womb.

CHAPTER II

MARY, THE MOTHER OF THE SAVIOUR

Our Blessed Lady the Second Eve—Her Immaculate Conception—Her freedom from actual sin—Her co-operation with Christ in the work of Redemption—Her intercession.

THE Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God. She is the Mother of him whom before his birth she was commanded to call JESUS,[1] since, as it was said to Joseph her spouse, he should save his people from their sins.[2] She is the Mother of Christ the King; she is the Mother of the Good Shepherd, the Saviour, the Redeemer; as such she was most closely united with him (so far as creature may be) in his redemptive work.

Such has always been the belief of the Church. The mystery of the Redemption is the analogue of the mystery of the Fall. The Wisdom of God coming to our rescue has provided an appropriate remedy, as a divine corrective, for the human folly which led to our undoing. "Where sin abounded, there doth grace much more abound." At each point of contact, or rather of contrast, there

[1] Luke i 21. [2] Matt. i 21.

is the visible imprint of the Hand of God. A man led to our loss of the sanctifying grace of God; a Man gave us back the gift. Death reigned in the race of Adam; through one born of Adam's race true Life was restored to men. Death was the punishment decreed for our first father's sin; when the Redeemer died, death was found to be the one efficacious remedy for our loss. Then at last it could be said:

O Death, where is thy sting?
O Grave, where is thy victory?

The Tree in the Garden was the occasion of our loss; our healing is to be found in the Tree on Calvary. In the Divine Food given through all the ages by him who once hung upon that Tree, which is the source of immortality, we may find the antidote for the poison which lurked in the forbidden fruit of old.

Catholics are familiar with the liturgical Preface of the Passion:

"Thou didst place the salvation of the human race on the Tree, that whence death first arose, thence life should spring, and that he, who in Eden had gained his victory by the wood, by the wood should be overcome."

This, then, being the principle of what we may call compensation in the divine work of the Redemption of the human race, we shall

not be surprised to find that, as a woman played so large a part in our Fall, so, by the side of our Redeemer, there will be another Woman co-operating in our restoration. As there is a second Adam, so is there a second Eve. As both sexes yielded to the Tempter, so both sexes shall have their part to play in the fulfilment of the merciful designs of God. "I will put enmities between thee and the Woman, between thy seed and her Seed" is the first of recorded prophecies.

In a well-known passage[1] St Paul teaches that "Adam is a figure of him who was to come. . . . For if by one man's offence death reigned through one, much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ."

This doctrine—that our Lord came to undo the work of Adam, and to open the gates of Heaven which had been closed to his posterity as a consequence of his sin, thus becoming Adam's antitype by way of contrast—is a favourite theme with St Paul.[2] The corresponding doctrine that the Blessed Virgin is the antitype of Eve, and that therefore she is rightly called the Second Eve in the same sense that her divine Son is rightly called the Second Adam, is not indeed stated expressly in Holy Scripture (though it is implied by the

[1] Rom. v 14-17. [2] *Cf.* 1 Cor. xv 44-49.

primeval prophecy in Genesis); but, none the less, the teaching of earliest Christian antiquity proves that it belonged to the Apostolic Faith and was handed down by the Apostles to the Church.

On this subject Cardinal Newman[1] has set out with magisterial authority the witness of very early Fathers of the Church. We find the truth that Mary was appointed by God to counteract the work of Eve taught before the end of the second century by St Justin in the East; by Tertullian in the West; and by St Irenæus, who, having been brought up in Asia Minor in the school of St John, watered the Church in Gaul with his doctrine and his blood, and therefore belongs both to East and West.

For example, Justin wrote:

"We know that the Son of God, through means of the Virgin, became Man, so that the disobedience due to the serpent might have its undoing after the same fashion that it had its beginning, for, whilst Eve, still a virgin and undefiled, through acceptance of the word that came from the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death, Mary the Virgin, possessed of faith and joy, when the Angel brought her the glad tidings, answered: 'Be it done unto me according to thy word.'"[2]

[1] In his answer to Dr. Pusey's *Eirenicon*.
[2] *Tryph.* 100.

And Tertullian:

"It was whilst Eve was still a virgin that the word crept in which produced death. Unto a Virgin in corresponding manner must be introduced the Word of God who built up life, so that by the same sex whence had come our ruin might come also our recovery. Eve had believed the serpent, Mary believed Gabriel. The fault which the one committed by believing [the evil angel] the other by believing [the good angel] blotted out."[1]

And Irenæus:

"As Eve was seduced by an angel's word to shun God after having transgressed his Word, so Mary, also by an Angel's word, had the good tidings given her so that after obeying his Word she might bear God within her. . . . And as the human race was bound to death through a virgin, so through a Virgin it is saved; the poise of the balance is restored, and for a virgin's disobedience a remedy is found by the obedience of a Virgin, and Mary the Virgin consoles and rescues the virgin Eve."[2]

And again:

"As Eve had become the cause of death, so has Mary become the cause of salvation to herself and the whole human race."[3]

[1] *De Carne Christi*, 17.
[2] *Haer.* v 19.
[3] *Id.* i 33.

The importance of this teaching will be understood when it is remembered that St John died not more than thirty years before the conversion of St Justin and the birth of Tertullian; whilst St Irenæus was the disciple of St Polycarp, who was taught the Faith by the Apostle himself. Nor was there at any period a moment's hesitation on this subject. From the third century onwards it was taught in every part of the Catholic world without contradiction, and by the greatest of the Doctors of the Church, that, in the economy of our Redemption, Mary was appointed by God to undo the work of Eve.

Thus, St John Chrysostom, preaching on the Feast of Easter, dwells on the antithesis between Eve and Mary, to which I have already directed the attention of my readers. "Let us all rejoice today at the triumph of the Lord. He has turned against Satan the arms with which he once overcame. You ask me how: I will tell you. A virgin, a tree, and death represented our defeat: these three have all become for us principles of victory. In the place of Eve we have Mary; in place of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the wood of the Cross; in place of the death of Adam, the death of the Saviour."[1]

I will allow myself before leaving this subject a short reference to the testimony

[1] *Hom. in S. Pascha.*

of St Jerome. Jerome may be said to represent the whole Christian world, excepting perhaps Africa. He was the intimate friend of Pope Damasus at Rome, the disciple of Gregory Nazianzen at Constantinople and of the celebrated Didymus at Alexandria. Born in Dalmatia, at different periods of his career he lived in Italy, Gaul, Palestine and Syria. Now, in one of his letters he writes as though enunciating a proverb, known to all: "Death by Eve, life by Mary."[1] Whilst St Jerome was writing this in Europe, the great St Augustine in Africa expressed the same truth in all but identical words: "It is a great mystery that as it was through a woman that death befell us, so through a woman it was that life was born to us—perdition by Eve, salvation by Mary."[2] This truth belongs, if anything belongs, to the earliest and universal tradition. Our Lady is the second Eve in the same sense that Christ is the second Adam, joined to him in the blessing of our reparation even as the first Eve had been joined to the first Adam in the calamity of our Fall.

Here we have a principle of our religion from which, when we reflect upon it carefully, we shall see that certain conclusions of great interest and importance will occur to the mind. For example, we are prepared (apart

[1] *Ep.* xxii 21. [2] *De Symbol. ad Catech.*

from all other considerations) to learn that the Mother of God, through the foreseen merits of her Son and Saviour, was preserved in the first moment of her existence from original sin (which otherwise would have overtaken her as one of Adam's descendants) and that she was even then dowered with the supernatural grace of God. This revealed truth we speak of as the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I would refer my readers to the volume[1] in this series which deals with the Fall of man, for a full statement of the Catholic doctrine of original sin; it will be sufficient to say here, that it is of the essence of that doctrine that God raised our first parents to a state above Nature, bestowing upon them his sanctifying grace as a free gift to which, by nature, they had no claim. Through the sin of Adam (in which Eve bore her share) this gift was lost for all Adam's children save only for her, who alone was chosen by God to undo our first Mother's evil work. Grace was bestowed not only upon Eve in the very opening of her life, but also upon Mary, that she, too, might at the first instant of her existence be found on the side of God as Satan's foe. The enmity between Mary and the Tempter is no new story. Already when Gabriel hailed her she was *gratia plena*,

[1] Vol. X.

full of grace. Divine grace was hers without stint and came to her with life itself. Thus was she fittingly prepared for the virginal Childbearing through which was crushed the serpent's head.[1] The Virgin Mother of God is the Immaculate Mother of the Saviour of the world.

This truth, contained implicitly[2] in the universal Tradition of the Church, and necessarily involved in the teaching of the Fathers concerning Mary the second Eve and her entire sinlessness and purity, was solemnly defined by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854. With joy, therefore, we hail the Mother of God " without spot or stain or any such thing " from the first moment of her existence, until she was gathered to her eternal rest in the unveiled Presence of her Lord. For the Church teaches us[3] that the Mother of God was free, through the Grace of Christ, not only from original sin, but also from the slightest actual sin. " The Blessed Virgin," writes St Thomas, " was chosen by Heaven to be the Mother of God; but she would not have been a Mother fitting for God, had she ever sinned. Therefore we must simply

[1] *Cf.* 1 Tim. ii 15.

[2] In Vol. I of this series (*Faith and Dogma*) it is explained that a truth may be contained implicitly in revelation, and at a later date be explicitly defined.

[3] In the Council of Trent.

confess that the Blessed Virgin never committed any kind of sin whatsoever."[1] Our Lady's office as the New Eve (*mutans Evae Nomen,* Eva changed to Ave) is not the only mystery of our religion which involves her sinless conception and her fulness of grace—even more is it the direct consequence of her Divine Motherhood. She is the Holy Mother of God.

Mary's peerless sanctity, her freedom not only from original sin but also from actual sin, is the inevitable condition of her nearness to the Person of our Lord, who is the source of all supernatural holiness that has ever been possessed by any creature. In his Uncreated Nature he alone is essential goodness—the All-Holy God, and of him in his Humanity we are told that he was separate from sinners[2]—"holy, innocent, undefiled, elevated above the heavens, separate from sinners."

This last phrase should cause us to think carefully. Our Lord, after becoming Man, in a real and true sense was far from being separate from sinners. It was an accusation brought against him with vehemence that he was the sinners' friend—an accusation which he was careful not to repel. With public sinners he sat at meat and welcomed

[1] *Summa Theologica,* p. 3, q. xxvii, a. 4.
[2] Heb. vii 26.

them to his Side and to his Feet. If we call to mind his relations with the Magdalen, with the Thief on the Cross, with Peter after his fall, with countless broken-hearted men and women crushed by an intolerable weight of sin, we shall see that far from separating himself from their company he drew them always closer and closer to himself. "Come unto me *all* ye that are burdened and heavy laden." Yet it still remains true that he whose footstool is the heavens, when he visited our earth in the Human Nature which he assumed, remained "separate" from all that was displeasing to God. It could not be otherwise. No man might accuse him of sin, for sin could not come nigh unto him who is the Lord our God. When, then, we remember that he deigned to derive his human life from the life of his Mother, we shall share at once the feeling of St Augustine, who, when writing of the universality of sinfulness in all the descendants of Adam, "with the exception of the holy Virgin Mary," refused to entertain the question of sin where she was concerned, "since she merited to conceive and bring forth him whom all allow to have no sin," for to her was granted grace, greater than that conferred upon all others, "that she might vanquish sin in every respect."[1]

[1] *De Nat. et Grat. contra Pelag.* xii.

The Son of Mary was without sin in virtue of the Hypostatic Union of his Humanity with the Person of the Word; Mary was sinless, but through the grace which God bestowed upon her in abundant measure, that she might be fitted—so far as creature could be fitted—to provide the blood, drawn from her own body, with which her Son would redeem Adam's race from the guilt and punishment of sin. His Mother was too close to him for sin to touch her. Our Lord held forth his hand and by his merits preserved the chosen creature, whom by her Motherhood he had united so closely to himself, from the slightest spot of sin which could displease him, or even for a brief moment disfigure her soul in his most holy sight. And on this account Mary his Mother rejoiced beyond measure in God her Saviour. She was redeemed in the highest way—the way of prevention—from the shipwreck that involved all the other children of Adam, all our race, in dire catastrophe. As St Francis de Sales writes:

"God bestowed upon his glorious Mother the blessedness of the two states of human nature; for she possessed the innocence which the first Adam lost, but also enjoyed after the most excellent manner the Redemption which the second Adam obtained for men."[1]

[1] *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. II, 6.

Tota pulchra es Maria et macula non est in te. "Thou art all beautiful, Mary, and in thee is no stain." The Mother of God is a creature like ourselves, and like all other creatures she depends absolutely upon her Creator; but she, alone of all creatures, is without sin, for in all creation she stands alone as having, by the power of the Holy Ghost, communicated her flesh and blood to him, who when he became incarnate upon the earth still remained "separate from sinners" and elevated above all the heavens.

Let me repeat it: by physical nearness and the nearness of his human sympathy and compassion he would indeed draw near to sinners without shrinking. During the days of his public ministry, and as he hung upon his Cross, he was no more separate from the Magdalen than from the Immaculate. On Calvary, by their side, was John the beloved, and other holy women too; the Good Thief also was close to him in the agony of his passing. He was the Lord of all—of Mary Immaculate and of John the Beloved; of the Magdalene, of the Thief, and of the rest hard by—and of all he was the Saviour. But one was near to him in a sense that no other might ever be, for in all that goodly company one only called him Son. Once more it should be said: the sinlessness of Mary was bestowed upon her for the sake, supremely, of her All-Holy

Child. Her sinlessness is part of the reverence due to God.

* * * * *

Our Blessed Lady was united with the Second Adam, her Son, both as his Mother and as the Second Eve, after a fashion and to a degree impossible for any other creature. She stands alone, in a position apart, in her relation to the Redeemer and to his Work of Redemption.

It is of the first importance that we should always bear in mind that our Lady gave free consent to the part she was called upon to play in the Mystery of the Incarnation. At first she hesitated, not being certain as to the Will of God in her regard. Heaven waited, as Gabriel hung upon her words, for her submission. "Be it done unto me according to thy word" was the direct response to the encouragement: "Fear not, Mary, it is as God would have it be. The Holy One to be born of thee shall be the Son of God." Our Lady's *Fiat*, when it came, was operative in its direct effect. In deep humility the Queen of Heaven bowed her head, as she spoke her word, and when she spoke, the Lord of all was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us. From that tremendous moment the association of the Holy Virgin with the Incarnate Saviour and with the purposes of

his Coming was so close that we can never hope to grasp its full significance. It still persisted when the Lord of all gave up his Human soul into his Eternal Father's Hands, sin and Satan were overcome, and the world redeemed. Beneath the Cross of Calvary the Mother of God was still the Handmaid of the Lord; still she surrendered herself in complete submission. She stood by the Redeemer's side uniting her will to his: one with him, even as of old our first mother had stood by the side of Adam beneath the shadow of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the opening chapter of the fateful story of our race.

There is only one Redeemer, one Lord and Saviour of us all. That is the very alphabet of the Christian religion. On the other hand, every Christian is called upon, as St Paul writes, to be "a fellow-worker with Christ."[1] We are urged to co-operate with Christ not only that by good works we may make our own salvation sure,[2] but also in order that thus we may "fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ for his Body which is the Church."[3] Nothing can be "wanting" in these sufferings themselves, for each of them is of infinite worth; and yet something is "wanting," since our Lord has left us something to do which he looks for

[1] 1 Cor. iii 9. [2] 2 Peter i 10. [3] Col. i 24.

(however infinitesimally small when compared with what he has done), in order that through his merits, which alone give supernatural merit to anything we can do, we may both work out our own salvation, and also aid all those for whom he died. In union with him and by his grace we are permitted to share in his work " for his Body, which is the Church." Again, St Paul ventured to write of himself that " he became all things to all men, that he might save some."

Every Christian, therefore, may in this sense co-operate with Christ in the work of the Redemption; but our Lady does so in a far higher, closer, deeper sense than any other of the Members of his Body, in virtue of that intimate union with him and with his redeeming work, of which I have already written. The co-operation of the Mother with the Redeemer who was her Son differs not only in degree, but also in kind, from that of any other Saint. For her consent alone he waited when he sent Gabriel to her presence. She alone is his Mother; she alone, as the second Eve, stood beneath the Cross.

The words of St Bernard are well-known: " One man and one woman have wrought us exceeding harm; nevertheless, thanks be to God, through one Man and one Woman all things are restored . . . and indeed Christ

would have sufficed. Surely all our sufficiency is of him; but it would not have been good for us that Man should be alone. Rather was it fitting that both sexes should take part in our Reparation, for neither sex had been guiltless in our Fall."[1]

"In the Christian religion," writes Cardinal Billot,[2] "Mary is absolutely inseparable from Christ both before and after the Incarnation. Before the Incarnation in the hope and expectation of mankind, after the Incarnation in the worship and love of the Church. For, indeed, in the primeval prophecy we were shown not only Christ, but also the Woman whose child he is; so that I seem to see in the vision granted to our first parents a type of the Christian religion as it was one day to be, as we now see it, in the Image of the Virgin holding her Son in her arms upon our altars throughout the world."

Eve sinned before Adam, Mary was born before Christ. Mary gave Christ to us to redeem us from our sins. A religion that separates Mary from Jesus—the Woman from her Seed—is neither the religion of the promises and prophecies as we read of it in the Old Testament, nor the religion of their fulfilment as we see it in the New. The Fathers

[1] *Sermo de Duodecim praerogativis B.V.M.*, i, 2.
[2] *De Verbo Incarnato*, p. 401 (Rome, 1912).

of the Church assure us that our Lady conceived Christ in her heart by faith before she conceived him actually in her womb. The Holy Virgin was even more closely united to her Son by grace than by nature in order to fit her, so far as might be possible in a creature, for her sublime office. Her dignity as Mother of God, her intimate union with the Saviour of the world in his Work of Redemption, should be regarded together. For her dignity and for her office she was prepared both spiritually and physically, in her soul and in her body. Fr. Gallwey writes: "Our Lord loves his Blessed Mother more because of her high graces than on account of the natural tie—*but both are his own creation.*"[1]

In the New Testament we are shown the picture of Mary saluted by the angel, Mary in obedience unparalleled on earth, Mary in her deep humility, Mary giving utterance to her *Fiat*—"Be it done unto me according to thy word"—Mary overshadowed by the Spirit of God, Mary the chosen vessel of election, Mary the Mother of the Word, and then—after her years of union with her Son in the Holy House of Nazareth—Mary beneath the Cross, the head of Satan crushed, Man delivered. The Fathers of the Church

[1] *Memoirs of Fr. Gallwey, S.J.*, p. 92.

supply the commentary when they teach us how the Mother of God undid the work of Eve.

If we will absorb this Scriptural and patristic teaching we can hardly fail to realize in some small measure the wonder of our Lady's office and function as the Mother of the Saviour of mankind, and of our Lady's share in the reparation of the evil work of our first parents. One is our Saviour. He alone redeemed us, yet he deigned to associate his Mother with his work of Redemption. Mary is the cause of our salvation, even as Eve was the cause of our ruin. This is the teaching of all antiquity.[1]

Such thoughts as these should be of much service to us when we turn our minds to the consideration of the Blessed Virgin's intercession with God on our behalf. We can all co-operate with our Most Holy Redeemer, yet Mary's co-operation stands alone; similarly we can all pray one for another through Christ our Lord, yet Mary's mediation and the efficacy of Mary's prayer is something by itself, unlike that of any other creature. In both cases the fundamental reason is the same

[1] Thus St Ephrem (*Op. Syr.*, tom. ii, p. 327): "Those two innocent, those two simple ones, had been equal the one to the other; but afterwards, one became the cause of our death, the other of our life."

—of all creatures she alone is not only the servant, but also the Mother of God. All our Lady's privileges rest ultimately on this great fact. If we consider the Catholic doctrine, we shall find that it can be set out in a few simple propositions:

1. All supernatural graces, like all gifts to man in the natural order, come from God ALONE as their fountain-head.

2. All supernatural graces are conferred through Jesus Christ. We pray "through our Lord Jesus Christ" and through him only. He is the only Mediator of Justice between God and man; for he alone is both God and man. Through him alone the wall of partition created by sin between the Heavenly Father and his earthly children was broken down. He is the only Saviour of mankind. Yet—

3. All members of his mystical Body can mediate with the Mediator, and through the Mediator can mediate with the Father; this is called intercessory prayer. To this mediation St Paul constantly exhorts those to whom he addressed his letters; and to this mediation St James attaches the greatest importance, urging Christians to "pray for one another that you may be saved."[1]

4. This mediation of Christians, one for another, is not to terminate with our earthly

[1] James v 16.

life, but is to continue after death. We are taught to believe in the Communion of Saints in Heaven as on earth. The Saints of the Old Testament, Moses, David, Elias; the Saints of the New Testament, Mary the Mother of our Lord, St Mary Magdalen the Penitent, the disciple whom Jesus loved with a special love, the disciple to whom Jesus gave the keys, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, still intercede for us who are left struggling *in via* (in the "estate of the way"), not yet, as they, *in patria*—in our true country which is above.

5. Amongst the prayers of all the Saints our Lady's intercession has a special place apart, as the direct consequence of her special relation to the Lord of all, who is also her Son, to whom she was so closely joined in his earthly Life and Work, especially at Nazareth, at Bethlehem, and on the Hill of Calvary.

But, further than this, it is commonly believed amongst the faithful that *all* graces obtained for us by the Death and Passion of our Most Holy Redeemer are bestowed after the prayer of Mary. This pious opinion has been taught expressly by St Bernard, the Blessed Robert Bellarmine, St Bernardine of Siena, St Alphonsus Liguori and other Saints; in our own days it has received approval in the Encyclicals of one

Pope after another, and quite recently has been encouraged by the fact that a Mass and Office have been granted to several Religious Orders and to all the Dioceses of the Kingdom of Belgium in honour of the Blessed Virgin as "Mediatrix of all graces."

It is, then, believed that our Lady prays not only for some or for many of the graces we receive, but for all. Apart from the weight of authority which encourages us to believe that this is the case, it would seem to follow from our Lady's co-operation in the acquisition of grace, since it is difficult to separate the distribution of graces from their acquisition. Mary certainly co-operated by her consent to the Will of God in the divine action which *acquired all* graces, for all graces have been acquired solely by the Incarnation and Passion of her Son, in which, as we have seen, she bore her special part, even as Eve had shared in Adam's sin. Can we then be surprised at the belief of so many great Saints, as well as of the faithful generally, that she also bears her special part, by her prevailing prayer, in the *distribution* of all the graces obtained by her Son?

To this matter we can apply the most true words of Fr. Marin-Sola, O.P.:

"The faith and filial piety of the Christian people has been the best and most powerful

auxiliary of speculative logic with regard to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, as it has been and always will be in regard to all the dogmas that do not concern the intelligence exclusively, but also the heart of man."[1]

Our hearts tell us that we owe all to Mary who gave us Jesus Christ, nor do our hearts deceive us.

We read in the holy Gospel that Mary brought Jesus to the house of her cousin Elizabeth:

"And she entered into the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost, and she cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this unto me, that the Mother of my Lord should come unto me? For behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed.'"[2]

From the constant Catholic tradition we know that when the babe leaped for joy when

[1] *L'Évolution Homogène du Dogme Catholique*, p. 331.
[2] Luke i 40-45.

Mary spoke, at that moment, through the merits of Christ his Saviour, he was cleansed from the stain of original sin and sanctified whilst yet within his mother's womb. The birthday of the Baptist alone amongst the Saints is celebrated by the Church. In his case, clearly, it was through the mediation of Mary, when she spoke her words of salutation and Elizabeth rejoiced at her coming, that God gave the grace of Christ to the child unborn. This was the first of the graces won for men by the foreseen merits of the Redeemer of which we find express record in the Gospels. We receive it on the word of one who, we are told, was "filled with the Holy Ghost," in order that in every ensuing age men might read and ponder, and marvel as they read. It was the norm and example of graces innumerable that should be bestowed upon the children of Adam, from the day when Mary entered the house of Zachary and Elizabeth, to the end of time.

Who shall dare to separate those whom God has joined together, the Mother and the Son? We love to linger on the hallowed words: "Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." He is the Saviour; she is the Saviour's Mother. Whence is this unto me that the Mother of my Lord should come unto me? Whence is

this unto me that the Mother of my Lord should pray for me? Her prayer is all-powerful with her Lord, for he will refuse her nothing, who deigned to be called and to be her Son.

CHAPTER III

MARY, THE MOTHER OF CHRISTIANS

MARY, Mother of God, Mother of the Saviour, is also the Mother of men and especially the Mother of Christians; she is the Mother of all those for whose sake God became man, for whose redemption our Saviour died. God has given her to be not only the Mother of Jesus, but our Mother too, the Mother of every human creature who may read this little book, the Mother of the poor sinner who writes it. Needless to say she is not God's Mother and ours in the same sense. She is the Mother of God physically, since she gave God his Human Life; she is our Mother not physically, but none the less really, after a supernatural manner. This spiritual motherhood of Mary it will be the object of this chapter to elucidate, but I should like for a moment to pause and observe that the idea of motherhood in itself involves the idea of secondary causes. Nothing can be more certain than the fact that God ordinarily governs, sustains and aids his creatures not by his own direct action, but through the action of his creatures one upon another. This is

true both in the natural order and in the order of grace.

If we glance first at the order of nature we shall find that Almighty God gave us our being by an act of his Will, and maintains us in existence by his Power; yet in a true sense it may be said that our life was bestowed upon us by our mother at our birth. Of course *all* depends upon God. This is taken for granted and does not need to be continually repeated. Throughout life we rely upon our parents and schoolmasters and friends for the food, education, and sympathy which alone make life tolerable or even possible.

Manifold and diversified are the human relationships which are necessary to us as we pass our days upon earth. We travel from God to God, but from the beginning to the end, from the day when we were brought into the world to the day when we are placed in our coffin by human hands, we depend, absolutely, upon the good offices of our fellow-men.

We need not, then, be in any way surprised to find the same principle of secondary causes at work in the supernatural scheme which has been set up by the Divine Wisdom for our redemption and for the sanctification of our souls. To God's dealings with mankind through our holy religion, there is always to be found a parallel in that everyday natural way

of living with which we have all of us, by long habit and usage, grown familiar. For example, as we need bread to sustain the life of the body, so do we need the Bread that cometh down from Heaven to sustain the life of the soul—both should be our daily food; or again, from time to time our body needs medicine as a remedy for its ills, so the Church provides supernatural medicine for the healing of the souls of her children. I need not give further illustrations, though numbers occur to the mind, but will say at once that to those who are familiar with the workings of the Providence of God, as he satisfies the necessities of both soul and body, it will be no surprise to find that, as the Almighty has given men an earthly mother to care for them in the days of their weakness, so has he given his children a heavenly Mother to watch over them in their journey through life with a mother's love and a mother's tenderness. Our true Mother is Mary, our Lady, the same Mother whom he gave to his Son, who became a child for love of men and deigned to need a mother's love.

This Catholic doctrine of the twofold Motherhood of Mary—Mother of men as well as Mother of God—depends upon many principles, to some of which I will draw the attention of my readers.

1. To our earthly mother we owe our earthly

life. So in the supernatural order our Lady is the Mother to whom we owe the life of the soul. This life—the life of grace—depends exclusively upon him who *is* Life, and from whom all life flows. "For the Life was manifested," writes St John, "and we declare unto you the Life Eternal, which was with the Father and hath appeared to us."[1]

"The Life was manifested" when our Lord Jesus Christ was born of Mary the Virgin. Full of grace, full of love for God and man, the Blessed Virgin, as his earthly Mother, bestowed upon the everlasting Word of God his earthly life, bearing bodily him whom she had conceived by the Holy Ghost; at the same moment, as our spiritual Mother, she bestowed upon us "the Life Eternal, which was with the Father and hath appeared to us." When, with the same great love still burning in her heart, she stood on Calvary's Hill, once more she gave life to man in giving her consent to the Passion and Death of her Divine Son; for the life of our souls is due directly not only to the Incarnation, but also to the Redemption, and in each our Blessed Lady had her allotted part to play.

2. St Augustine writes: "Mary, alone, doing the Will of God is the Mother of Christ bodily; spiritually she is both sister and

[1] 1 John i 2.

Mother, and that Woman alone,[1] not only spiritually, but also bodily, is Mother and Virgin. Surely she is not spiritually the Mother of our Head. Rather of him, the Saviour, she is spiritually born, for she is among those who have believed in him, among those who are rightly called "the children of the bridegroom." But in very truth she *is* spiritually the Mother of the Members of our Head—that is of us—because *by her charity she co-operated in bringing about the birth in the Church of the Faithful who are the members of that Head;* whilst bodily she is the Mother of the Head himself."[2]

In these words the greatest of the Doctors of the Church reminds us of the emphatic teaching of the New Testament that by Baptism we are incorporated with Christ, becoming one with him. He is the Head, we are the Members of his Body which is the Church.

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" said our Lord from Heaven, for Saul of Tarsus was persecuting his Church on earth. The persecutor became the Apostle of the Gentiles, and showed that he had learned

[1] *Illa una femina.* The word *illa* ("that famous") marks her out from all other women and strengthens greatly the word *una.*

[2] S. Aug. *De sancta Virginitate,* cap. vi, 6.

his lesson well, when writing to the first Christians he taught them that their very bodies were the members of Christ.[1] No one can rightly separate Christ for one moment from those who are united to him by a mystical but most close and real union. Our Lady, then, who is the Mother of the Head of the Body, is also the Mother of each Member of the Body. Not only the natural but also the Mystical Body of Christ was the fruit of Mary's virginal motherhood. Before the birth of any one of us we belonged to our Lord as belonging to his Body. The Mother of God carried us together with her Divine Son when she visited Elizabeth and dwelt in the Holy Land. In a true sense the whole Church of God was enclosed, along with its Head, in the virginal Womb of his Blessed Mother.

3. Catholic theologians teach that when our Lord gave utterance to the Seven Words from the Cross, he spoke not merely for the needs of the moment, but also officially as Redeemer of the world. He intended that these last words of his should be recorded in the Gospels, thus providing for the needs of all time that was to come. When he prayed for those who were directly responsible for his death—indeed, for them he prayed in the first place—he prayed also for all men and

[1] 1 Cor. vi 15.

women who should crucify him anew by wilful sin and thus put him to open shame. When he pardoned the penitent thief, he declared his readiness to pardon all those in every age who, like the Good Thief, should confess their sins, own him as their Lord and seek forgiveness from his Sacred Heart. He prayed and made excuses for *all* sinners, when he prayed for some; he declared his readiness to forgive *all* penitents, when he forgave one; in like manner when he said to one disciple, "Behold thy Mother," he spoke to all. "When Jesus, therefore, had seen his Mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his Mother: 'Woman, behold thy son.' After that he saith to the disciple: 'Behold thy Mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own."[1] Our Blessed Lady stands at the foot of the Cross, not merely as the Mother of her dying son, but as the Mother of the

[1] John xix 26-27. There are Catholic writers who see in the word Woman, as used by our Lord to his Blessed Mother, both here and previously at Cana, a reference to the fact that our Lady is *the* Woman of Prophecy, *the* Woman who is, in a higher sense than was our first mother, the Mother of all the Living. But our Lord used the same word when addressing St Mary Magdalen, as it had previously been used by the Angels of the Resurrection (John xx 13, 15). It seems to have been the usual mode of address in Palestine at the time.

Redeemer of mankind. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear and heed his Redeemer's Word.

4. Perhaps the most striking proof of the reality of Mary's spiritual motherhood will occur to us after we have considered with some care the Christian doctrine of our adoptive Sonship. In a certain sense it may be said that the Creator is the Father of all his creatures, irrational as well as rational, since to him they owe their being; but we use the word " father " in a very wide sense when we say that God is the Father of the cattle or of the birds and reptiles. In a higher sense he is the Father of all his *rational* creatures, the Father of all men and women. But this does not approach to the sense in which Christians use the word when they speak of that Fatherhood of God which belongs to them as to the brothers and sisters of Christ. When St John wrote, " As many as received him, he gave them power to be made the Sons of God: to them that believe in his Name, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,"[1] he referred to a Fatherhood and a Birth and a Sonship, other than those which belong purely to nature. They who were already sons of God, both as the work of his Hands and as having been made as

[1] John i 12-13.

men and women after his image and likeness, received a new "power" that they might be made his sons in virtue of a new sonship, after a new Birth. Already born into the kingdom of this world "of the will of the flesh, of the will of man," they should be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, through the action of God's Spirit.

A birth and consequent sonship above the gifts of nature were to be granted to those who had already been born of a birth, and thereby received a sonship that did not pass the limits of that which concerns only this passing life. The gifts of grace were to be granted as an additional endowment to those who already possessed the gifts of nature. We find this truth insisted upon with much earnestness in the New Testament. For example, we are told that "we are not only called, but really are the Sons of God";[1] that "we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father";[2] and our Lord himself teaches his disciples when they pray to say boldly: "Our Father." If we ask ourselves how dare we thus speak—we poor sinful men—there is but one answer. Our Lord was not ashamed to call us his brethren. What he calls us, that we surely are—but if his brethren, then the Sons of God by adoption. So by the gift bestowed upon us when

[1] 1 John iii 1. [2] Gal. iv 6.

we receive new life in the mystery of Baptism (as we had received our first life in the mystery of birth from our earthly mother), we are made the brethren of the Son of God, and his Father is our Father. But as his Father becomes our Father, so also does his Mother become our mother. From the first moment when, for our sake, he became "partaker of flesh and blood,"[1] he became in time the Son of Mary as truly as from all eternity he was the Son of God. If his Father is our Father, then his Mother is our mother.

God, therefore, has given us his Mother to be our mother, and to care for us with a mother's love. The statement that our Lady is our mother is not merely a poetic expression —something which is a figure of speech. It is a strict truth, belonging to the spiritual order—to that order which is far more real, because more lasting than anything can be which will pass like a dream of the night. The Motherhood of Mary has its roots in time, but its promises are for eternity.

We read in the life of St Stanislaus Kostka that he would constantly repeat, with wonderful happiness, "*Mater Dei, mater mei*—God's Mother is my mother"—and we can, each of us, say the same. Can anything be more consoling? Mary is *God's Mother*. To his

[1] Heb. ii 14.

Mother God will refuse nothing. Mary is *our mother*, so she will refuse nothing to her children, when they kneel at her feet and beg her to show to them a mother's love, to extend to them a mother's care. There is something extraordinarily tender and trustful in the devotion of Catholics to their Blessed Mother; to which it is impossible to find a parallel. Our Lord we love supremely as our God and Saviour; his Mother we love, for his sake, because she *is* his Mother so near to him, because she loved him so dearly and watched over him so faithfully at Bethlehem, in Egypt and at Nazareth; we love her also because she is our Mother too. If our Lord had appeared on earth, as he might have done, without a human Mother to be his, he could not have been quite the same to us as he is when we read of him, as he actually did come, with his Mother by his side when he drew his first human breath at Bethlehem, and by his side when he died on Calvary. And as she was faithful to him unto the end, so we know that she will be faithful to us, who are also her children—the children of her tears.

Theologians are accustomed to point out that when God calls any creature to any office, he will give to that creature all the graces which are needed for the worthy discharge of the duties pertaining to that office. Thus, St Joseph was called to be foster-father of

Christ, and we know that God gave him all he needed for this sublime dignity. But Mary was called actually to be Christ's true Mother; her immaculate heart was, therefore, in such-wise fashioned by her Creator—made so gentle and unutterably sympathetic and true, in the highest sense so womanly—in order that God made Man might receive all the wealth of affection which a mother could give to her child. This was one chief purpose and end of her creation. By one creature at least our Lord was loved with a perfect human love—and Mary loved him not only with the love of a creature for her God, but also with the love of a mother for her Son. Nor should we ever allow ourselves to forget that our Lady loves us with the same loving heart with which she loves the Son to whom she gave birth at Bethlehem. Leaving out of consideration the love of God for men—with which, of course, we cannot compare any human love—next to the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus there can be nothing so pure, nothing so deep, nothing so wonderful as the love of Mary for her children. Our Lady is not only *speculum justitiae*, the mirror of God's sanctity; she is also *speculum amoris*, the mirror—the earthly reflection—of God's love. He has endowed his Mother with a Love that is above the love bestowed upon all other creatures; and this because of her nearness to

him who is the source of all pure love, who himself is Love essential.

Our Lady, then, will care for her children in the same manner that of old she cared for her Divine Son. When he needed her care she saved him from Herod who would slay him; she will save us from Satan. She gave him the food he needed in the days of his mortality; she will plead for us that we may receive the Food of immortality. She will help us to find him, should we unhappily lose him by our sins, as once after weary search she found him, in the Temple at Jerusalem. If we allow her, she will rule our lives, as for eighteen years he allowed her to rule his Life, when to her he was "subject" in the Holy House of Nazareth. As she was with him when he died, so will she watch over our deathbed and answer the supplications we have raised to her heavenly throne, never doubting her goodness, during all the days of our life; she will pray for us not only now, but, above all, in the dread hour when we lay us down and die.

But while Mary shows herself to be our mother above all in caring for us in our spiritual warfare, yet we can also turn to her with confidence in the needs that concern our life here below. Not only did she bring Jesus to the house of Elizabeth, when he would work that great work of grace, and

sanctify the unborn Baptist; but also "the beginning of miracles" was worked by her Son at Cana of Galilee, when, at her prayer, water was changed into wine by divine power at the marriage feast. It was her sweet voice to which Christ listened then, as it is to her sweet voice to which he listens now at such a holy sanctuary as Lourdes, or, indeed, the wide world over, when, at his Mother's pleading, he gives his gifts to men.

Father Faber asks rhetorically, in a well-known hymn: "Art thou really infinite?" Of course in the language of prose the answer can be only: *No*. Yet when we think of the Saints in Heaven, hearing the prayers of men in every land and at every hour, we know that they who possess the Beatific Vision, in a certain wide sense, share in the Divine Infinity. They who see God face to face, see all things in him; for no longer do they see as in a glass darkly, but in the light of the Eternal. This is true of all the Saints; above all is it true of our Lady, to whom all her children turn in every trial, in every emergency, whether of soul or body, knowing that never in any age has she failed those who seek her aid, for she is the mother of us all. St Anselm of Canterbury gave expression to the mind of the Church and the feeling of Catholics when he wrote: "O Mary, if thou art silent, none will pray, none will aid; when thou dost

pray, all will pray, all will aid. Oh! Queen most good to men, a thousand times a hundred thousand mortals cry to thee, and all are saved. I, too, will cry to thee, and shall I not receive thy help?"[1]

I have said that our Lady's Motherhood of men, especially of Christians, seems to depend chiefly upon four great principles. (1) Mary gave us the life of the soul when she gave us Jesus Christ; (2) she is the Mother of the Members of his Body as well as of the Head; (3) she was given to us by our Lord Jesus from the Cross in the person of the disciple whom he loved with a special love; (4) she is the Mother of him who is our Brother, and therefore is our Mother also, even as his Father is our Father too.

But once in the Sacred Scriptures our Lady is pointed out to us in her own person as the Mother of Christians. The disciple to whose care Christ had entrusted his Blessed Mother for what should yet remain of her earthly life, tells us that he beheld a mysterious vision. Mary had passed to her great reward, when he saw the long story of the Church unrolled as in a wondrous panorama. It

[1] Te tacente, O Maria, nullus orabit, nullus juvabit; te orante, omnes orabunt, omnes juvabunt. Millies centena millia hominum ad te clamant, Regina piissima, te omnes salvantur; et ego clamabo ad te et non auxiliabor?—Migne, P.L., tom. clix, p. 943.

was to be a story of bitter, enduring conflict. "And a great sign appeared in Heaven: A Woman clothed with the Sun, and the Moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve Stars. . . . And there was seen another sign in Heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns; and on his heads seven diadems. . . . And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered, that he might devour her Son. . . . And she brought forth a Man-Child, who was to rule all nations with an iron rod. . . . And there was a great battle in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels. . . . And the dragon was *angry* against the woman, and went to make war with *the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*"[1]

[1] Apoc. xii 1-17.

It is well known that it is often difficult in Holy Scripture to discover whether the *direct* reference (particularly in Old Testament types) is to the Mother, or to the Church, of Christ. We are taught by writers of great authority that our Lady and the Church are merged in the Sacred Writings into a mystic Unity; for example, already in the second century St Clement of Alexandria writes: "One only Mother Virgin. Dear it is to me to call her the Church." He was speaking in the first place of the Blessed Virgin (*Paed.* i 6). And St Augustine: "His Mother is the whole Church, because through the grace of God everywhere she gives birth to the

In this manner, throughout all the ages, the primeval prophecy was to be fulfilled: "I will put enmities between thee and the Woman, between thy seed and her seed."[1]

We read that the dragon of the vision is "that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan"; and we know who is the Woman, clothed with the Sun of Justice—Christ our Lord—and below her the Moon—this passing world—and on her head a crown of twelve stars; for is she not the Queen of the Apostles, who are her crown? We thank God that we are "the rest of her seed," her children

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faithful of Christ (*De Sancta Virg.* vi). It is also certain that our Lady represents and personifies the Church, as for example in her obedience: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy Word"; and in her prayer as at Cana: "They have no wine"; and in her submission to Christ: "Whatsoever he shall say to you, that do ye"; and in her faithfulness to our Lord to the end. Therefore, we shall not be surprised if we find that some of the few writers of antiquity who have written on this Vision in the Apocalypse refer it *in the first place* to our Lady, and others to the Church. In any case, even though the direct reference be to the Church, there can be no doubt that it is to the Church under the figure of the Blessed Mother of God, who is represented to us as the Mother, not only of the Man-Child who was to rule the nations with a rod of iron, but also of "the rest of her seed," who are expressly pointed out as Christians "having the testimony of Jesus Christ."

[1] Gen. iii 15.

too. If we endeavour to keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ, she who is the Queen of Heaven will fight on our behalf, with Michael and his angels by her side; for ours is the promise of God which endureth for ever. The Woman and her seed through all the ages, and until time shall be no more, will crush the serpent's head.

Our Blessed Lady is the Heavenly Mother under whose banner her children shall triumph over Satan and over sin.

Monstra te esse Matrem,
Sumat per te preces,
Qui pro nobis natus
Tulit esse tuus.

CHAPTER IV

MARY AND HER DIVINE SON

Our Blessed Lady at Bethlehem—At Nazareth, during the Public Ministry of her Divine Son—Her death and glorious Assumption.

FROM all eternity Mary of Nazareth was chosen by God to be the Virgin Mother of the Word made Man, to co-operate in the work of the Redemption, and to care for her children in the land of their exile with a heavenly Mother's love; but she too had once, like all other children of Adam, dwelt upon the earth, and thus was made ready for her rich reward.

It remains, then, for us to consider what we may gather as to our Lady's earthly life, passed by her for the most part in company with her Divine Son. Here we are treading on very holy ground indeed—nothing can be more mysterious than the relations of the Incarnate God with his Blessed Mother, as he led her soul step by step to heights of sanctity far above our mortal ken, through sorrows unimaginable—from earth to Heaven that she might, when life was past, be

crowned by his Hand Queen of Angels and of men.

Any Catholic who attempts to deal with this theme must feel something of what St Bernard felt when he wrote: "There is nothing which gives greater joy to my heart, yet there is nothing which inspires me with more fear than to treat of the glory of the Virgin Mother."[1]

Still, though we take off our shoes with awe, as we approach to contemplate the Virgin Mother's life on earth, reverently to do so should bring us nearer to her in veneration and love—so we may attempt the task, remembering always that we are thinking of one who, although a creature like ourselves, nevertheless always remains the predestined Mother of God.

The Old Testament is full of types of our Blessed Lady. Eve, Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Abigail, Judith, Esther—all prefigure, under one aspect or another, the Mother of the Saviour. Her virginal maternity was foreshadowed by the yet untilled soil in Eden, by the Burning Bush and Gideon's fleece, by the Ark of the Covenant and the Eastern Gate of the Temple, and, so the Fathers of the Church assure us, by many another mysterious episode in the time

[1] *Serm. iv de Assumptione.*

of God's preparation for the coming of his Son.[1]

I have no space in which to dwell on these figures of our Lady, nor on the prophecies which linked her name with that of her Son, who was to redeem Israel from captivity. We must come to the time of the fulfilment, when types and shadows should have reached their accomplishment in the perfection of that which they prefigured.

We find Mary first in the New Testament, as "a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David," when the Angel saluted her at Nazareth: "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women."

Catholic tradition tells us that for this salutation and for this coming of the Lord, and for this high blessedness, our Lady had been prepared by her Presentation as a child in the Temple, where she had passed her early life in prayer and meditation on the ancient Scriptures, and especially dwelling on the prophecies concerning the Messias whose advent was then eagerly expected by the Jews. Already the time marked out by Daniel had arrived. Israel was waiting full of expectation. . . .

And now the Holy Virgin knew that he had come and that he was hers—wonder of wonders,

[1] *Cf. The Mother of Christ*, pp. 336-388.

he was her Son. Soon she was to see his Face amidst the straw at Bethlehem, to worship him with every fibre of her being, to love him with every beating of her heart, with a love far, far beyond the love of the Cherubim and the Seraphim. She loved him with the love of the creature for her Creator and of the Mother for the fruit of her womb. This twofold relation between Jesus and Mary was to persist to the end of her life and to endure for eternity. Unless we bear it steadily in mind nothing is intelligible in the sacred narrative. We are as far away from any understanding of the mystery of Mary if we forget that she is both servant and Mother of her Lord, as we should be from any understanding of the mystery of Jesus were we to forget that he is both God and Man.

I have already written something of the marvel of the Visitation when our Lady bore her Child over the hills to visit Elizabeth.[1] Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost, and Mary, who was even then the living shrine of the Godhead, burst into song of a beauty unimaginable. Her soul magnified her Lord who had done such things for her, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour. The Queen of Prophets was not afraid to declare aloud that all generations should call her Blessed, reaching forward through the long

[1] pp. 47-48.

ages in dim futurity, for God had put down the mighty from their seat and had exalted the lowly and the meek. When we listen to the *Magnificat*, we feel it is one of the most unimpeachable of all prophecies, the most sublime of all thanksgivings, and the most thrilling of all poems. Mary's soul was full of joy and of holy exultation when thus she magnified the Lord before her child was born; after he had come to her, she was to bear him in her arms as she listened first to the *Nunc Dimittis* of the aged Simeon, and then to the solemn warning, "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."[1]

Our Blessed Lady's mind was not only steeped in the ancient Scriptures—she knew that the Messias was to be the Man of Sorrows—it was also specially illuminated by God. Already she knew full well that his Mother must in large measure share her Son's appointed lot; but now the seal was, as it were, impressed upon that knowledge, as Simeon's threnody fell, like a death knell, upon her ears. In very truth a sword should pierce her inmost soul, that out of the hearts of countless millions the thoughts of the broken-hearted should be revealed. In the dim future, through the long ages inspired by Christian faith, Mary's children, stricken with

[1] Luke ii 35.

grief otherwise intolerable, were to kneel before the image of the desolate Virgin, and there find comfort for their bleeding hearts. But before this could come to pass, her own life had to be lived through, her own heart pierced by the sword of agony, that thus it might be duly fashioned and made ready as the home of the hopeless and the refuge of the sinner who repents.

The glad Mother of the Lord was also to be the Mother of Sorrows—she was to be the Mother of the Crucified. Deep as the sea is thy desolation, O Virgin Daughter of Sion, and who shall be compared with thee, either in thy joys that are incomparable, or in thy grief which is beyond all measure?

Nor could the delay be long before the sword pierced our Lady's heart. It was but a brief period after the Blessed Virgin had shown her Child proudly to the homely shepherds and to the wondering Wise Men from the distant East, that she[1] "heard the voice in Rama, lamenting and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children and refusing to be comforted because they are not." For the first time in the world's history women were weeping, their children dying, because tyrants feared and hated the Name of Christ, and Mary's heart was broken.

[1] Matt. ii 18.

She herself had to fly into the foreign land of Egypt, far from friends and home, because her first duty was at all costs to safeguard the life of her Son, who had been entrusted to her care. When at last Herod was dead and his threats a thing of the past, the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, went back to Palestine.

Our Lord was but twelve years of age; "when he remained in Jerusalem and his parents knew it not . . . and it came to pass that after three days they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them, and asking them questions . . . and his Mother said to him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"[1] As we read we recognize that he is the Divine Child. No young boy, who was merely a boy like other boys, could rightly thus act and speak.

The relations of our Divine Lord with his Blessed Mother, as they are recorded in the gospels, would be utterly unintelligible, were he nothing more than a great Jewish Teacher, and she only the Mother of that Teacher. The key to that which otherwise would be so perplexing may be found in the fact that

[1] Luke ii 41-49.

he is not only Man, but also that his Mother's soul was during her earthly life being moulded by his hand for her eternal destiny as Queen in his kingdom. It is the realization of this supreme reality—as to who Jesus is and who Mary—which opens out to our gaze, as we ponder on the gospel narrative, a vista of transcendent loveliness and awe-inspiring majesty. In the dealings of our Blessed Lord with his Mother no merely human measure can be applied, for here the divine and the human meet in sublime conjunction. Two things we know: Inscrutable are his ways and unfathomable is his love for the chosen creature of his predilection whom, in all-wise but unsuspected ways, he drew to a degree of nearness and of union with himself that could be reached by no other. There can be only one Lord Jesus Christ, and only one Mother of God. They stand apart from all the world beside. God will deal with Mary as with no other, for she will understand as can no other.

"But his Mother kept all these words in her heart."[1]

If the story of the loss and finding of our Lord in the Temple is deeply charged with mystery, more mysterious far are the words that tell us what followed: "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth and was

[1] Luke ii 51.

subject to them."[1] *He* was the Lord God Incarnate, *they* were his Mother and his foster-father, the work of his hands. Amongst other purposes of his coming, Christ came to be our example—from the age of twelve to the age of thirty no other example is given us by him excepting that of his "subjection" in the Holy House of Nazareth. During that long reach of years Mary and Joseph were catching from his lips the secrets of the Kingdom which he set up in their hearts, as they learned with ever increasing simplicity and perfection to do the Will of God, his Father.

Great sorrows—the sorrow of Simeon's prophecy, of the Flight into Egypt, of the Loss in the Temple—came to our Lady before the eighteen years she passed at tranquil Nazareth; during the sojourn there, so far as we know, all was peace, excepting that St Joseph died who was so dear to her, and the shadow of the Cross hung over her through the day and through the night. She knew what had to come. And at last the hour struck. That which had been foreshadowed during the three days in the Temple had to be fulfilled during the last three years of our Saviour's life. They had to be spent away from the society of his Blessed Mother. Now he was to be, during the period that

[1] Luke ii 51.

immediately preceded the Passion, in a special sense about his Father's business—teaching all those who would listen to his Word, training his chosen disciples for their future apostolate, laying the foundation of his Church, giving hearing to the deaf and sight to the blind, making the lame to walk, raising the dead to life, and speaking words sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, that should linger in the world, haunting the hearts of men, to the end of time—above all by undying parable and actions of heavenly kindness teaching his Father's Love, for he and the Father are One. And all the time Mary, his Mother, could not be by the side of her Son. She remained in isolation with his Brethren, some of whom at least believed not in him—and once again her tender heart was well-nigh broken and Simeon's sword pierced her soul.

Looking back, as we do, through nearly two thousand years of Christian history and tradition, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to form any adequate idea of the circumstances which surrounded our Lord's Public Ministry. We know that he was God: none of those who were drawn to him when he began to teach had the slightest idea of any such thing—to them it would have seemed sheer madness and blasphemy of the worst kind—a sin especially hateful to the Jews.

The minds of his disciples had to be attuned most carefully—first to the idea that he was the Messias, and then . . upwards to the very heights. We see the first great step: "Whom do *men* say that I am? . . . Whom do *you* say that I am? . . . . Blessed art *thou*, Simon, son of John, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee."[1] And then in all its dread completeness: "So long have I been with thee and hast thou not known me, Philip? He that seeth me seeth the Father also."[2] And the tremendous assertion: "Before Abraham was made I AM."[3]

It is very remarkable that through all this necessarily elaborate process our Lord, from time to time, speaks almost provocatively, as though to stimulate thought in the Church in the generations yet unborn, when his Godhead should have been recognized to the full. He wished also to rivet to attention the minds of his disciples, and, indeed, of all who were listening to him, by introducing the element of surprise into his speech. Such sayings of Christ which will at once occur to the mind are: "The Father is greater than I."[4] "Why callest thou me good? One is good only."[5] "Weep not for me;"[6] and there are many others of a like character.

[1] Matt. xvi 17.
[2] John xiv 9.
[3] John viii 58.
[4] John xiv 28.
[5] Luke xviii 19.
[6] Luke xxiii 28.

The Saints and mystics of the Catholic Church have mused unceasingly upon the mysterious words which fell from the lips of Christ. From them they have drawn consolation, wisdom, strength, as the bee draws honey from the flower. They have furnished matter for the profoundest reflections of Doctors of the Church, and have been one of the chief means by which Christ's servants have been drawn to the heights of contemplation and union of the soul with God. It should hardly be necessary to say that, when rightly understood, they are all fully consistent with the true doctrine of the Eternal Godhead of the Word made Man; but historically they furnished ammunition for the Arian heresy. This our Lord disregarded. It was merely incidental and could not be allowed to interfere with the high purposes, which ever directed his earthly life. If men should misunderstand, let them see to it. They would be solely responsible, for they would run counter to the warnings and to the teaching of his Church. In this manner they would only make shipwreck of the Faith. Christ spoke for all time, for the ears of the faithful in every age; he spoke also for the sake of those who were listening to him at the moment. He would not go beyond *their* knowledge, since to have done so at the time would have served no useful purpose.

We find the same remarkable set of facts with reference to our Blessed Lady. Her privileges are clear and conspicuous in the Gospel, standing out in bold relief, so that it is hard to miss them. The story of the Annunciation and of the first visit to Elizabeth need no comment to bring out their full significance. But, just as the Arian has found, in the very Gospels which proclaim the Divinity of our Lord, materials on which to ground his denials, so have others found certain incidents which they use against the Church in consequence of the honour which she pays to the Blessed Mother of our Lord. For example, when our Lord had once been speaking to the crowds, a certain woman lifting up her voice said to him:[1] "Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck." But he said: "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it."

On this there are several things to be observed. We must bear in mind that in his public speech our Blessed Lord was always intent upon inculcating a practical lesson. Of this we have here a striking instance. As we have already pointed out,[2] the great Saints have insisted that our Lady is even more blessed through doing the Will of God, in which all may imitate her, than in her Divine

[1] Luke xi 27. [2] p. 42.

Childbearing—a grace bestowed upon her by God in which she must of necessity stand alone.

Also, it is certain that, according to the established custom of Orientals, the woman who spoke to our Lord lifted up her voice in *his* honour, not in the honour of his Mother; for in the East, if they wish to praise a man they will praise his ancestors, if they desire to dishonour a man they will curse his forebears to many a generation—so that if our Lord is deprecating honour paid to any, it is that shown to himself rather than that offered to his kinsfolk, however near they might be to him. Again, there can be no doubt that his Mother had been proclaimed Blessed among women both by Gabriel sent from God's Throne to Nazareth, and by Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost in the house of Zachary, whilst the Baptist exulted yet unborn. Any argument or inference which would tend to lessen the force of this, and of our Lady's own testimony that all generations should call her Blessed obviously proves too much and falls to the ground slain by its own weight. And yet, as a matter of fact, this saying of our Lord has created a difficulty, hard to dispel, in the minds of some people who have seen in it, however unreasonably, a disparagement of the honour shown to the Blessed Virgin by Catholics.

To take a second instance. Christ was once told by the multitude that his Mother and Brethren were seeking for him. At the time he was away from them all, about his Father's business, and asked, "Who is my mother and my brethren?" He then answered his question himself, looking upon those whom he had been teaching: "Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the Will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."[1]

Surely a spiritual lesson of enormous value for all time. I have already reminded my readers[2] that St Augustine, commenting on these words of Christ, says that our Lady, in doing the Will of God, became not only Mother, but sister to her Son, and Christians in every age can learn from these words to be mother and brother and sister to their Lord. Yet, I think our Lady's heart ached when she heard the manner in which she, who was his Mother in the strict sense of the word, apparently was passed over. Can we not find a faint reflection here of the anguish of her Divine Son, when, in apparent abandonment, he cried aloud to his Father in bitter agony before he died? Not only on Mount Calvary, it was hers to share, so far as creature might, in the sufferings of Christ. The Passion of our Lord found its echo in

[1] Mark iii 31-35. [2] p. 53.

the compassion of his Holy Mother. In truth the sorrows of Mary, the sorrows of her trans-pierced heart, were necessary not only that many thoughts should be revealed of sorrowing men and women, but also for her own perfect sanctification. Her soul had to be made perfect in the furnace of trial and tribulation. As in all things else, so pre-eminently in this must she resemble our Lord, that he was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. Of all the redeemed his Mother must be nearest to his Cross, not only on Calvary, but also in every hour of her earthly pilgrimage.

But that pilgrimage, both for Jesus and for Mary, at length was over. And now that our Lord is glorified in his Kingdom, every tear that his Mother shed on earth shall be wiped away by his pierced Hand, and changed into a jewel in the crown upon her peerless Brow. Mary must die, for this is the lot of mortals. "It is appointed unto man to die, and after death the judgement;" and as Jesus died, so will his Mother die, for in all things, so far as may be, shall her lot be like to his; moreover, since all her children must pass one day through the gate of death, so bitter to human nature, so their Mother will go before them, treading the same path. But in her passing hence there will be for her no bitterness, death will lead her straight to God. She had waited, obedient to the Will

of God who would have her remain a while on earth, the Apostles' Queen. But now the chains which held her captive at length were broken and her sinless soul winged its flight to be with her Son for ever. And Mary's judgement: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Were these words for which all Christ's servants wait expectant ever spoken as when they were addressed to her, who alone was crowned in Heaven as the Mother of her Lord?

The bodies of the holy Apostles, of the Martyrs who shed their blood for Christ, of men and women famed for their sanctity, were to be carefully preserved and venerated in the Church from the first beginnings of Christ. Of the Mother of God no relics should remain upon the earth. Mary was taken up, body and soul, to the unveiled Presence of her Son. She was the mystic Ark of the Covenant which God had sanctified. The body of the Virgin Most Holy from which the Holy Spirit had formed the Body of Christ should not be permitted to see corruption. Behold the Queen in her Beauty by the side of her Son, as already the Psalmist saw her in prophetic vision, in a vesture of gold wrought about with divers colours. She is the Eldest Daughter of the Father, and the beloved Mother of the Son, and the chosen Spouse of the Everlasting Spirit.

We, too, have to die and to meet Christ in judgement. We trust to be greeted with forgiveness and love as we enter into his Kingdom. He will not reject us, whose arms were extended wide for us upon the Cross of pain. "Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus who died for us?"[1]

But if, notwithstanding all, our hearts fail within us at the thought of our sins and miseries, we will entreat our dear Mother, who is also the Mother of our Judge, to be to us *Felix caeli porta*, the gate of a happy eternity, that when all is passing and death is near, she may turn her eyes of mercy towards us, and show unto us at length the ever-blessed Fruit of her womb, Jesus, teaching us to trust him absolutely and to the full. So may it be for us all—we beseech thee, O loving, O kind, O sweet Virgin Mary.

[1] Rom. viii 34.

EPILOGUE

THIS, then, is true devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

That we honour and venerate her above all other creatures.

This springs from Christian *Faith*. She is the Immaculate Mother of our God.

And

That we trust her with complete trustfulness.

This belongs to Christian *Hope*. She is the Mother of our soul's salvation.

And

That we love her with all our heart.

This is part of Christian *Charity*. Love of God's Mother, who is our Mother too, is part of our love of God.

Here is the treasure which we should hand down most faithfully to our children and to their children's children, to be their bulwark and strong defence, against the snares of the wicked enemy—to bring them unfailingly home in the end to the Haven of rest where they would be, to Mary and to her Son.

Ave stella matutina.
Ave causa nostrae laetitiae.
Ave sancta Dei Genetrix.

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